

# Ceramic Series

ABERYSTWYTH ARTS CENTRE No. 39

MARY ROSE YOUNG by David Briers



Mary Rose Young was interviewed on daytime television a while ago, as she made and decorated some of her earthenware pots in her studio. 'Engaging' would be the best word to describe the way in which she presented her work, and the work itself. Despite being obliged to observe the time-honoured *Blue Peter* tradition of bringing out prepared pieces at crucial points and saying 'Here's one I finished earlier', she did also manage to make it seem the most natural thing in the world to throw a clay mug, stick handmade ceramic roses all over it, decorate it riotously in the brightest colours possible, and still come up with something useful, stylish, unusual, and fun. She also made it seem as though anybody could make a living from doing likewise, if only they set their mind to it. And perhaps they could, but the non-daytime-TV reality is that although Mary Rose Young is now able to make ceramic tableware which is highly personal but which everybody else also likes

and wants to own, the path which has led to her securing this fortunate position has not been strewn with roses all the way, and has proceeded somewhat at a tangent to the status quo of the studio ceramics world.

Mary Rose Young lives ensconced in the Forest of Dean, that fascinatingly unique area of Gloucestershire near the Welsh border, resistant to invasion since the year dot, and still a close-knit community. Unlike most contemporary 'country potters', she did not have to make the conscious decision to move into the rural environment, because she was there already. The Forest of Dean was where she was brought up, and most of her family still live there. Paradoxically, her ceramic ware is free from any of the most obvious 'country potter' trademarks, and many people not knowing otherwise assume that it has been made in the middle of London.

When Mary Rose Young started her found-

ation course studies at Cheltenham Art College about twelve years ago, she most enjoyed drawing and illustration, but also became interested in ceramics along the way. Subsequently she joined the ceramics course at Wolverhampton Polytechnic, where she was allowed maximum elbow-room for experimentation whilst avoiding the precious self-regard of college fine-art departments which alienated her. She still feels quite strongly about that, and quotes Picasso's sketchbook drawings as examples of wonderful art which still manage upon occasion to be "so silly and funny".

After making a name for herself at college, she found herself suddenly out in the real world and at the bottom of the proverbial ladder again, having to devise several short-term ways of staying alive. These jobs, entirely unrelated to ceramics, she did so badly, or were so unrewarding, that she was forced towards the realisation that she had to be a creative maker of

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some sort, and so had to find a way of making such a lifestyle viable. Failing to secure a Crafts Council grant to set up a studio, she turned instead to that other great national cultural support service, the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. With this incentive, and some valuable free advice and encouragement from Mick Casson, she set about developing her throwing and decoration techniques, for (another paradox) she had to teach herself how to throw pots after leaving college.

She sold the pottery she made each week from a barrow on Bristol's popular quayside stretch of giftshops and arts centres. Although sales were far from overwhelming at first they built up gradually and eventually she attracted attention and orders from further afield. She took part in the prestigious Chelsea Crafts Fair, where the second time round she was a sell-out, with considerable orders from the United States. And the *Observer* colour supplement commissioned her to make a ceramic Filofax cover, which was anti-Filofax really, being smothered in 3D roses, sheep and a giraffe, and impossible for a media person to slip into their pocket. By now her order books are full to bursting point, and she is facing the dilemma of not wishing to disappoint potential buyers, while resisting a decline in quality through over-production (see Sandy Brown and Morgen Hall for similar stories).

But however well her work may be selling, she has never courted popularity for its own sake or by the easiest route, and everything she does has developed from things which she has firstly wanted to make for herself, for her own house. Her house, in fact, with its walls and furniture hand-decorated in a style the very opposite of reserved, reflects her attitude to life and creativity, for there is no dividing line between what goes into her living spaces and what goes into her ceramics, right down to a lavatory garlanded with bright painted roses and decorative pointillism. There cannot be many potters who have accommodated an entire lavatory bowl in their kiln, but nor are there many who would make ceramic wall-lights for their living room like mixing bowls and colanders, replete with ceramic spoons. And on the roof one of her chimney pots is actually a giant decorated mug, which becomes an environmental scale steaming cup of cocoa whenever the fire is lit. This sculptural side of Mary Rose Young's work also extends into the work she makes to sell, which comprises eccentric one-off pieces alongside a range of functional tableware.

Most of Mary Rose Young's pieces are painted all over. Turn over a plate decorated with running chickens and you will find some more running around the base. Thus one might tend to think of her as a decorative applied artist rather



than a potter, though the throwing and preparation of each piece takes as much time and is given as much care as its subsequent decoration. You can tell this as soon as you pick up one of her cups (or better still drink from it), for they have a crispness which somehow only a handmade ceramic item possesses.

When a piece has been thrown and its base turned, and any extraneous decorative features such as ceramic roses have been made and added, it is left to dry, and then the porous surface is painted quite quickly with underglaze colours. She avoids necessitating the great act of faith required by most potters prior to firing their work by using colours which are not greatly

modified by the kiln, so they go into it looking basically as they will when they come out, apart from being rendered glossy and brighter. Most of the pieces are decorated exuberantly with bright yellows, blues, oranges, greens and salmon pinks juxtaposed with reckless panache. Some are striped or spotted, whereas others feature cockerels, chickens, crows or fish, and of course the eponymous rose motifs of their maker. She never makes preliminary designs for her ceramics, although she still fills many a sketchbook with drawings and feels that the activity of drawing feeds directly into her ceramic work.

Some of her favourite or most popular designs are repeated (we would be disappointed if they weren't), though exact replication is simply not in the nature of what she makes. Every now and then she will resist incipient repetitiveness with something unexpected, like the black & white pieces which punctuate her coloured ware to great effect, or the recent experiments with "goldifying" (her term) pots all over with metallic glaze usually reserved for discreet rim decoration. To go with her cups, bowls and plates she also makes striped or spotted twisty ceramic spoons, which are great fun and look as though Uri Geller has been at Hansel & Gretel's gingerbread house.

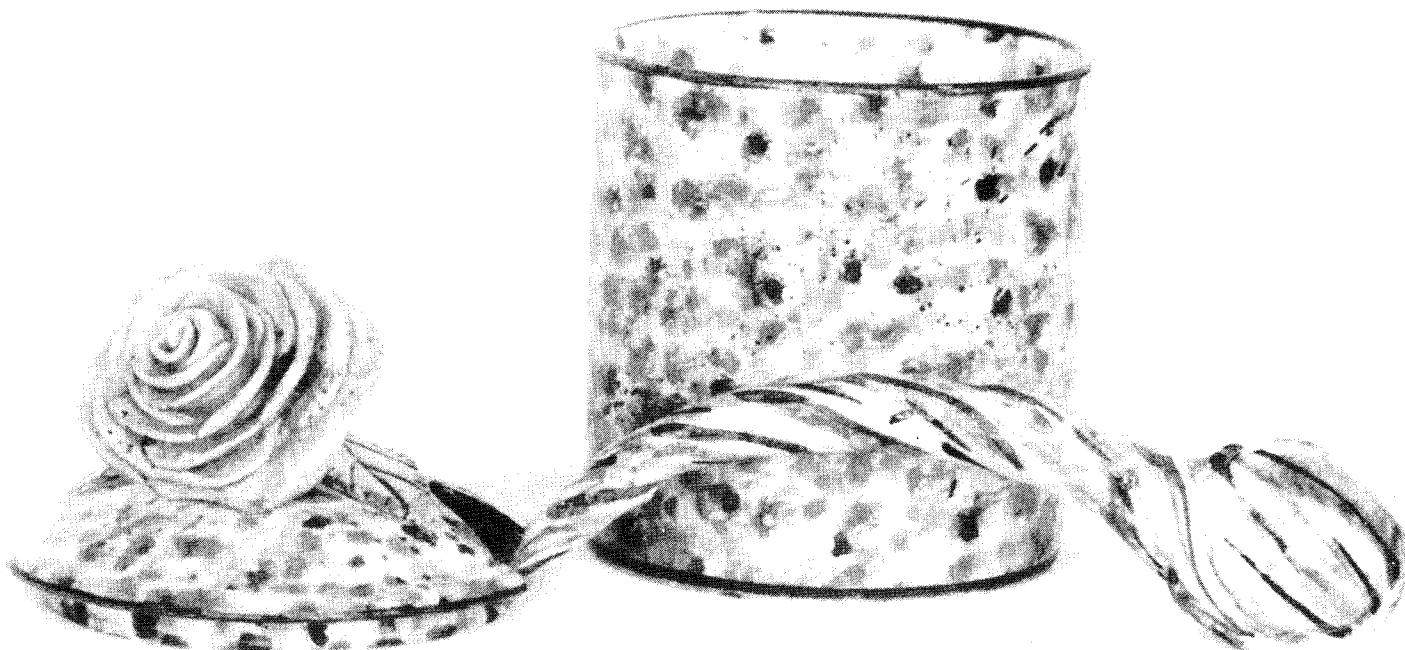
Sometimes it seems ponderous or even portentous to let a lot of words get in the way of the direct enjoyment of contemporary studio tableware. So let us just say that Mary Rose Young's pieces are each more 'unique' than you might think, if that is not a contradiction in terms, and with an added caveat that photographs do not do them justice, may we point you in their direction.



# Y Gwyfres Cerameg

CANOLFAN Y CELFYDDYDAU ABERYSTWYTH RHIF 39

MARY ROSE YOUNG gan David Briers



Beth amser yn ôl ar raglen teledu yn ystod y ddydd, gwebyd cyfweliad â Mary Rose Young tra oedd hi wrthi yn ei stiwdio'n llunio ac yn addurno rhai o'i photiau pridd. 'Swynol' fyddai'r gair gorau i ddisgrifio'i gwaith a'i dull hithau o'i gylwyno. Er gorfod cydymffurio â'r hen draddodiad 'Blue Peter' o ddod â phot parod i'r golwg o bryd i'w gilydd, ar adegau allweddol, a dweud, "Dyma un wnes i'n gynharach," llwyddodd ar yr un pryd, fel pe ba'r peth mwyaf naturiol dan haul, i lunio myg clai ar droeli, gosod rhosynnau ceramig gwaith llaw drosto i gyd, ei addurno'n gynhyrchu rhywbedd defnyddiol, lluniaidd, anghyffredin a hwyllog. Llwyddodd hefyd i roi'r argraff y gallai unrhyw un ennil i'r fywoliaeth wrth wneud yr un peth, pe baent yn mynd ati o ddifrif. Adichon y gallent; ond yn y byd real y tu allan i stiwdio teledu, er bod Mary Rose Young nawr yn gallu creu llestri ceramig sy'n gwbl bersonol ac y mae pawb arall yn eu hoffi ac yn eu chwennych, y gwir amdan iwrth iddi gyrraedd y sefyllfa hapus hon ar hyd llwybr nad oedd yn fêl i gyd a'i bod yn bwrw ymlaen i gyfeiriad tra gwahanol i'r hyn sy'n arferol ym-

myd cerameg stiwdio.

Mae Mary Rose Young yn byw yn glyd a chysurus yn Fforest Ddene, y rhan hyfryd, unigryw, o Swydd Gaerloyw ger goror Cymru, sydd wedi gwrthsefyll pob mewnllifiad ers oes Adda, ac sy'n parhau i fod yn gymuned glos. Yn wahanol i'r mwyafrif o 'crochenyddion gwledig' cyfoes, fu dim galw arni i ddod i benderfyniad ymwybodol i symud i amgylchfyd gwledig, gan ei bod hi yno eisoes. Yn Fforest Ddene y magwyd hi ac yno y mae'r rhan fwyaf o'i theulu yn dal i fyw. Yn groes i'r disgwyl, mac ei chynhyrch ceramig yn rhudd oddi wrth nodweddlion amlycaf y 'crochenyddion gwledig', ac mae llawer o bobl nad ydnt yn gwybod yn amgenach yn cymryd yn ganiataol mai ynganol Llundain y cynhyrchir ei gwaith.

Pan gychwynnodd Mary Rose Young ar ei chwrs sylfaen yng Ngholeg Celf Cheltenham tua deuddeg mlynedd yn ôl, arlunio a darlunio a rod-dai'r pleser pennaf iddi, ond dechreuodd ymddiddor mewn cerameg hefyd. Yn dilyn hynny ymunodd â'r cws cerameg ym Mholytechneg Wolverhampton, lle y cafodd bob

cycle posibl i arbrofi, tra'n osgoi yr hunan-dyb mursennaidd cysylltiedig ag adrannau celfyddyd gain a oedd yn wrthun ganddi. Mae hynny'n dal i'w chyffroi, a bydd yn cyfeirio at frasliniau Picasso fel engrheiftiau o gelf odidog sy'n dal ar adegau i allu bod yn "gwbl wirion a doniol".

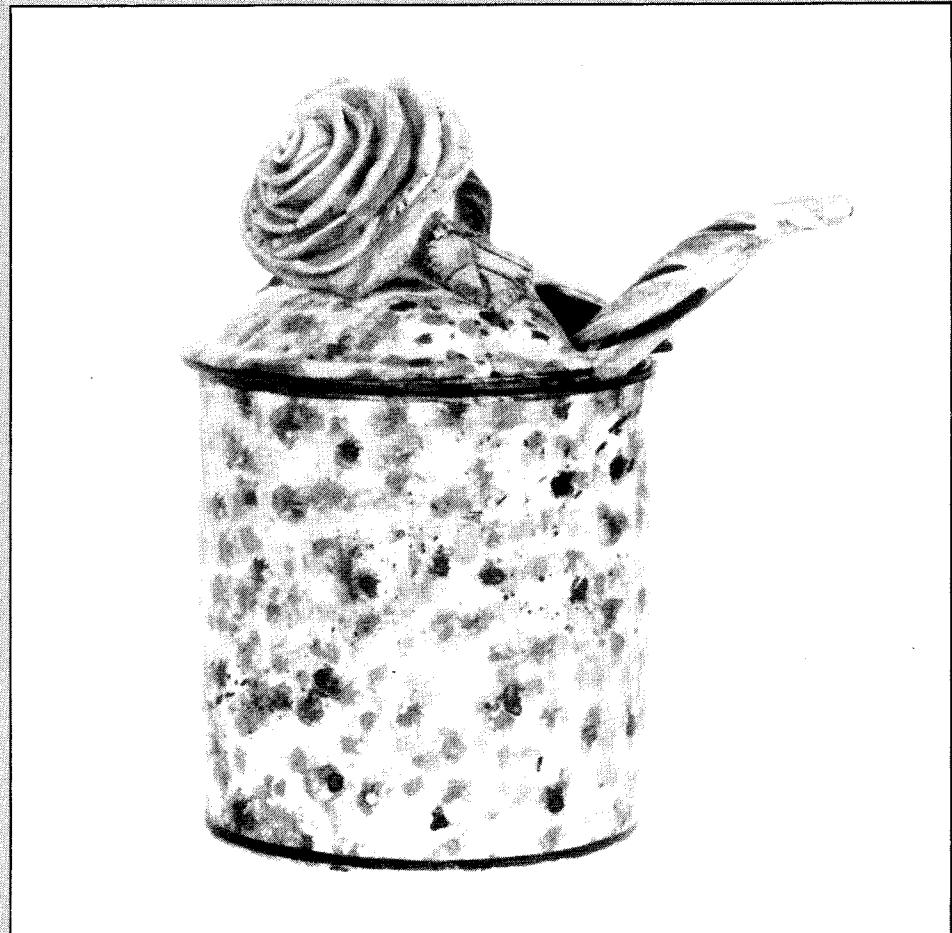
Ar ôl gwneud enw iddi ei hun yn y coleg, yn sydyn fe'i cafodd ei hun allan yn y byd real ar waelod yr ysgol draddodiadol unwaith eto, ac yn gorfod dyfeisio amryw o gynlluniau humor byr i'w chynnal ei hun. Roedd hi'n cyflawni pob un o'r swyddi hyn, nad oedd unrhyw gysylltiedd rhwngddynt â cherameg, mor aperfeithol, neu yn eu cael mor anfoddaol, nes iddi gael ei gorfodi i sylweddol bod yn rhai ymgymryd â rhwng waith creadigol, a bod yn ofynnol iddi wneud hynny mewn modd a fyddai'n ei galluogi i ennill bywoliaeth. Ar ôl bod yn allwyddiannus yn ei chals i gael grant ar gyfer sefydlu stiwdio gan y Cyngor Crefft, trodd ei golygon at wasanaeth cenedlaethol noddi diwylliant enwog arall, y Cynllun Menter. Gyda chymaint â hynny o grymhelliad, a pheth cyngor gwerthfawr, di-gost, ac anogaeth gan Mick Casson, aeth ati

ddatblygu ei thechnegau trin troell ac addurno, oherwydd (yn rhymedd ddigon unwaith eto) bu'n rhaid iddi ei hyfforddi ei hun i lunio potiasu ar y droell ar ôl iddi adael y coleg.

Buddai'n gwerthu'r byn a gynhyrchai bob wythnos ar stondin symadol ar y rhan boblogaidd o'r cei ym Mreste lle ceir siopau anregion a chanolfannau celf. Er nad oedd y gwerthiant yn syfranol o bell ffordd ar y cychwyn, gwelodd gynnydd graddol ac ymhen amser dechreuodd ddeni sylw ac archebion o gylch eangach. Cymerodd ran yn Ffair Greftau ddyllanwadol Chelsea, ac ar yr ail achlysur gwerthodd y cyfan o'i chynnyrch ac ennill archebion sylwedol o'r Taleithiau Unedig. Comislynwyd hi hefyd gan atodiad liiw yr Observer i greu clawr ceramig ar gyfer *Filofax*, rhywbeth a oedd mewn gwirionedd yn wrth-*Filofax*, gan ei fod wedi ei orchuddio â rhosynnau, deftaid a jiraff tri dimensiwn ac yn gwbl amhosibl i unrhyw berson ym myd y cyfryngau ei daro yn ei boced. Erbyn hyn mae ei llyfr archebion yn orlawn, ac mae hi'n wynebu'r broblem o beidio â siomi prynwyr potensial tra'n gwrthsefyll dirywiad yn ansawdd ei gwaith oherwydd gorgynhyrchu (profiad cyflebyb i brofiad Sandy Brown a Morgen Hall).

Ond pa mor dda bynnag y mae ei gwaith yn gwerthu, nid yw hi erioed wedi cefnio ennill poblogwydd er ei fwyn ei bun na thrwy ddewis ffyrdd rhwydd o wneud pethau, ac mae popeth y mae hi'n ei wneud wedi datblygu o bethau roedd hi eisiau eu gwneud yn y lle cyntaf iddi hi ei hub, ac ar gyfer ei chartref ei hun. Yn wir, mae ei thŷ gyda'i furiâu a'i dddodrefn wedi eu lliwio â llaw mewn arddull sydd yn y pegwn arall i'r hyn a elwid yn swil, yn adlewyrchu ei hagwedd at fywyd ac at greadigrwydd, oherwydd nid oes unrhyw wahanfur rhwng yr hyn sy'n cael ei roi yn y mannau mae hi'n byw yn ynddynt a'r hyn sy'n cael lle yn ei cherameg, gan gynnwys bowlen tŷ bach sydd wedi ei haddurno â rhosynnau wedi eu peintio'n llacbar a phwntiliaeth addurnol. Go brin fod llawer o grochenyddion wedi cynnwys bowlen tŷ bach yn ei chorffolaeth yn eu hodyn, nac ychwaith lawer a fyddai'n llunio goleuadau cerameg ar gyfer muriau eu hystafell fyw a'r rheini'n edrych fel bowlenni cymysg a cholan-derau ac yn cynnwys llwyau ceramig. Ac ar do ei chartref, myg addurnol anferth sy'n troi'n gwpnaid chwilboeth o gocoa ar raddfa amgyl-chol pan fydd tan wedi ei gynnau, yw un o'r potiau ar y corn simmai. Mae'r wedd gerfluniol hon ar waith Mary Rose Young yn ymestyn hefyd i'r gwaith y mae hi'n ei wneud ar gyfer ei werthu, sy'n cynnwys eitemau unigol hynod yn ogystal â chyfres o lestri bwrdd defnyddiol.

Mae'r rhan fwyaf o botiau Mary Rose Young wedi eu peintio drostynt. Pe baech chi'n troi plât



wedi ei addurno â chywion iei'r yn rhedeg, er mwyn cael golwg ar ei gefn, fe welech chi ragor o gywion yn rhedeg ar yr ochr honno. Gallai hyn arwain rhywun i feddwl amdan fel artist addurnol yn hytrach na chrochenydd, er bod paratoi a llunio pob eitem yn cymryd yr un amser ac yn hawllo'r un gofal a'r addurno sy'n dilyn. Daw hyn yn amlwg cyn gynted ag y codir un o'i chwpanau (neu'n well byth yfed ohono), gan fod rhywfreuder cain yn perthyo iddynt nas ceir mewn dim ond gwrtwrych cerameg a lunwyd â llaw.

Pan fydd eitem wedi ei llunio ar y droell a'r gwaelod wedi ei ffurfio ac unrhyw addurniadau ychwanegol megis rhosynnau ceramig wedi eu llunio a'u gosod yn eu lle, fe'i rhoir o'r neilltu i sychu ac yna peintir yr arwyneb hydraidd yn burt sydyn â lluniau tanwydredd. Mae hi'n osgoi'r gweithredu mewn ffydd sy'n wynebu'r rhan

fwyaf o grochenyddion cyn iddynt roi eu gwaith yn yr odyn, drwy ddefnyddio lluniau na chaiff eu newid rhyw lawr yn yr odyn ac sydd o ganlyniad yn dod allan yn edrych yr un fath yn eu hanfod ac yr oeddyn pan aethant i mewn, ac eithrio eu bod yn fwy disgrair a llyfn. Addurnir y mwyaf o'i gwrthrychau yn afielthus mewn lluniau melyn, glas, oren, gwyrrd a phinc samon llachar a'r rheini wedi eu cyfosod â 'panache' ysgafala. Mae rhai ohonynt yn rhesog neu'n frith, tra mae eraill ohonynt wedi eu haddurno â cheiliogod, cywion, brain neu bysgod, ac wrth gwrs y motiffiau rhos sy'nadleisio enw eu gwneuthurwr. Fydd hi byth yn paratoi cynlluniau ymlaen llaw ar gyfer ei cherameg, er ei bod yn dal i lewni aml i lyfr â braslluniau a'i bod yn teimlo fod y weithred o ariunio yn cael ei bwyo'n uniongyrchol i'w gwaith cerameg.

Mae rhai o'i hoff gynlluniau, neu'r rhai mwyaf poblogaidd, yn cael eu hail-adrodd (byddai'n siom pe na baent), er nad yw ail-lunio manwl yn perthyn i natur ei gwaith. O bryd i'w gilydd bydd yn gwrtwrych ymhud i'r amlwg drwy wneud rhywbeth annisgwyl, megis yr eitemau du a gwyn sy'n ymddangos yn effeithiol iawn ymblith ei llestri llwgar, neu'r arbrofion diweddar o "euro" ei photiau drostynt â gwydredd metalig a gedwir fel rheol ar gyfer addurn cynnil ar ymylon llestri. I ganlyn ei chwpanau a'i bowleni a'i phlatiau bydd hefyd yn cynhyrchu llwyau ceramig troellog rhesog neu frith, sy'n wrthrychau llawn hwyl ac yn ymddangos fel pe bai Uri Geller wedi bod yn ymhel â thŷ teisen sin-sir Hansel a Gretel.

Weithiau ymddangys yn orddifrifoi a rhwysgfawr i ganiatâu i drudh geiriol dddod rhymgwm â mwynhad uniongyrchol o gerameg stiwdio dygofoes. Felly bat am fodloni ar ddweud yn symi fod pob un o wrthrychau Mary Rose Young yn fwy 'unigryw' nag y byddech yn tybio, os nad yw hynny'n wrthdywediat, gan ychwanegu'r rhybudd nad yw ffotograffau yn gwneud cyflawnder â hwyl, a'ch cymhell i fynd i'w gweld drosach eich hunain.

